

Letter from Taizé

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Experiences of small communities

WELCOMING TOGETHER

This summer in Taizé, during the discussions about different forms of small communities, groups for sharing or prayer, the most obvious motivation seemed to be a deeply felt need to come together in the name of Christ, and not merely the need to belong to a group where one is accepted and recognized, like a natural family to which one belongs. Coming together on account of Christ means in part supporting one another, helping one another to live out his or her commitments and learning from each other's experiences. This is the way a young Italian put it: "In our apartment, we pray together every day before going to work. Then we meet for the evening meal, but usually we have invited many guests to that. Always being together to welcome others, especially people with problems, has made it easier to be hospitable: we are not alone in the face of the suffering of those who come. I have also discovered to my surprise that now the experiences of the others seem to be my own. When I am with others, I see that I can give what I have received without even realizing it."

A COMMON THIRST

When small groups take the time to read Bible texts together and to meditate on them, sharing takes on another dimension. When we attempt to listen together with others, we are often astonished to discover that Christ speaks to each one and opens a road for him or her to follow. These lines from Austria speak about this: "For a long time now we have offered the possibility of a time of sharing after the prayer held on Thursdays at the cathedral. But the

discussion was not very fruitful; it seemed like a series of monologues. Then we decided to choose the Gospel for the coming Sunday as the theme for reflection, and we discovered a common thirst. The simple fact that we dared to express this thirst enabled others to talk about their own. By turning to the Gospel, we are rediscovering that we are pilgrims."

A GROUP VOCATION?

For most of these groups, whether they belong to movements, parishes, or are more spontaneous, the same question comes up: what is our place in the Church? Some find it necessary to begin by affirming their own identity before thinking about being part of a larger community. In Spain, one experience among others has shown a new possibility: instead of defining oneself by emphasizing their difference or originality, a community of young adults is trying to assist the parish communities in their district. They meet among themselves for prayer and formation, but for several years now they have been in charge of the religious education of young people in the district. Their experience can also be helpful for people who are already involved in religious education, in charge of the liturgy or other parish activities. How could they invent a more communal way of doing it? Some have told us of their surprise to find that their proposal to have times of prayer or sharing during "business" meetings is accepted so well!

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT FAITH

Other kinds of small neighbourhood communities are sometimes

**Pope John Paul
at Taizé**
5th October 1986

**European Meeting
in London**

Mon 29th December 1986
- Fri 2nd January 1987

**Three
Worldwide Meetings
at Taizé
during summer 1987**

**Property of
Graduate Theological Union**

SEP 2 1986

formed to prepare holidays like Christmas or Easter, or informally because of activities with children:

"In our recently constructed district," writes a French family, "we have become acquainted with several couples who, like us, have school-age children. We began by organizing baby-sitting together, then a friend of ours told us of her difficulty in speaking to her children about faith. Since several of us had the same problem, we began to meet together to discuss it, first among ourselves, and later we would meet in the afternoon with the children to read Gospel stories together. As a matter of fact, it was just as new for many of the parents as it was for their children!"

A WEEK OF SHARING

During the coming months, meetings to prepare the pilgrimage to London will also provide the opportunity to share experiences between small communities in the same region. For a time, until the inter-continental meetings, some will live a more intense experience of sharing, by meeting together once a month for instance. Or else, as is often the case in Germany, others will propose a week of sharing: "Ten of us spent a week together. In the morning we began by reading together a Bible text. Then everyone went to work or to school. In the evening, every person explained what that text had meant for him or her during the day. The day ended with a prayer for and with all those whom we had met." □

Short meetings in the parishes

THIRSTING FOR COMMUNION

A young couple writes from the small Dutch town of Zwolle:

"This autumn a meeting will take place in Zwolle as a stage in the pilgrimage of trust. During the preparation many conversations were held with representatives of different churches. The following points seemed to be important:

"It is impressive to see how many people expressed their need for a space of silence in their daily life. But because of all their activities and commitments they are unable to create it.

"In parishes and communities many new initiatives show that little by little the Church is adapting to the social needs of the country. Evenings are organized with meals in common; catechism is taught in the homes; places of hospitality are created for drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes and the unemployed. Students, neglected neighbourhoods and people with no fixed dwelling are finding ways of being part of the life of the Church. Small communities, open to all, are coming into being with prayer at the centre of their existence.

"Gradually a need for communion is becoming felt in the midst of our individualistic society. There is a burning desire to create together with others a community life starting from one's own freedom and one's own possibilities and impossibilities.

"The meeting in Zwolle is also an occasion to discover how to move forward on the road of trust and how to live with families from the most varied church backgrounds."

PREPARING A SHORT MEETING

In the context of preparing for the European meeting, many similar meetings are being held in different places. They form a link between the summer in Taizé and the pilgrimage to London.

In just a few hours and without great resources, it is possible to spend an afternoon or a day together reflecting, sharing, praying together or making some visits. It can be a good occasion also to re-read, in an entirely different situation and with people who are unfamiliar with them, texts already read in Taizé. The "Letter to a small community" is particularly appropriate for such a day. But, depending on the participants, the "Letter to children and those who know how to listen to them" can also provide a wealth of reflections and suggestions. The two letters are contained in the "Letter from Madras".

Most often, these meetings will be held on a Saturday in October or November in a local church or community. They will take a different form in each place depending on the local situation, but some elements will be common to all of them:

SOME ELEMENTS

- After getting to know one another, a time of silence to meditate on a Bible text can be held, to begin by going to the sources of the faith. A church building is best for this.

The following texts go well with the "Letter to a small community":

Acts 2,44-47: (read the article on page 4 as well)

Ephesians 4,1-7.11-16: the unity of the Church and the diversity of services and gifts; each is a different part of the body.

Luke 14,12-14: Trusting in the resurrection, give your life here and now; every Christian community is called among other things to be a place of disinterested love.

- Sharing around the "Letter to a small community".

Read the letter aloud, slowly, to all; then split up into small groups, choosing either the first or the second part.

In the first part, the main thing is to see how small groups can help to animate the life of the local community. The second part deals more with the meaning of a personal commitment.

- Everyone can bring some food which will be shared at mealtime. If there is enough time to visit families before the meeting, perhaps some of them can invite the participants to their homes for a meal, as is done during the European meetings.

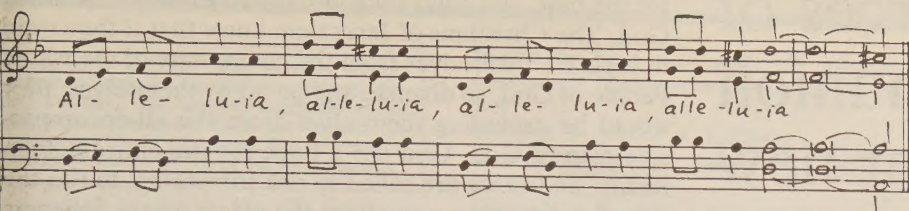
- If the meeting begins already in the morning, participants can gather for midday prayer, if possible in a church (e.g. singing - Bible reading - silence - prayer - singing).

The meeting ends with all taking part in the evening prayer of a local community or (if this is not possible) by a prayer together. By adding some simple songs, worship in a local church can be given a meditative character. If possible the closing prayer could even last the whole night.

- Before leaving, it is useful to set the date for the next meeting in another place and also to share information about the London meeting (group travel, prayers of departure, etc.).

Propositions for a common prayer

Alleluia



Reading

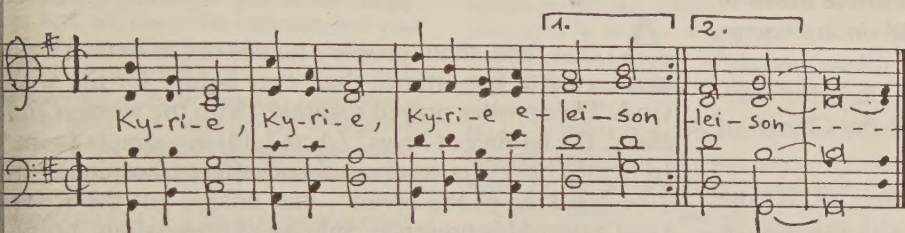
From the Letter to the Ephesians: Lead a life worthy of the call you have received. With all humility and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love. Take care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all. (4,1-6)

Time of silence

-My soul is longing and yearning for the courts of the Lord.
-My heart and my being sing out their joy to you, the Living God.
-Blessed those who dwell in your house, for ever singing your praise.
-Blessed those whose strength is in you and who seek out your roads.
-They pass through the valley of tears and make it a place of springs.
-With gathering strength they walk till they reach your dwelling-place.
-Lord God Almighty, happy are all who trust in you.

(from Psalm 84)

Intercession



Prayer

Lord Christ, your Gospel kindles in us the passion to forgive; it is like a flame burning within us.

We want to be ferments of communion in your Body, the Church, torn apart by divisions both old and new. When, poor in resources, we remain in your presence, entrusting to you our lives and the lives of others, you enlighten our minds and enable us to discern in others a desire for God, a thirst for communion often well concealed.

And when our humble prayer leads us to contemplate your forgiveness, your trust in us becomes a breath of life.

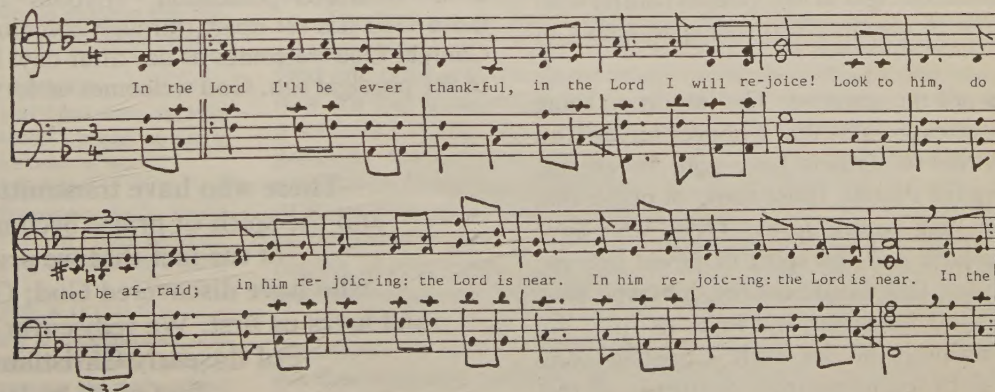
-For the Church throughout the world, that it may be a place of trust and welcome, Lord we pray.
-That all people may live in the joy of your peace, Lord we pray.
-Give us a spirit of forgiveness and generosity of heart, Lord we pray.
-Give us a spirit of prayer and praise, may we always give you thanks, Lord we pray.
-For all who strive for justice: sustain their hope, Lord we pray.
-For the leaders of the nations: may they work for justice and peace, Lord we pray.
-For the sick and those who live in constant pain, Lord we pray.
-For all who are in prison, condemned or exiled, Lord we pray.
-Console those who are bereaved or in sorrow, Lord we pray.
-Make us faithful servants of your Kingdom, Lord we pray.

-...

(Prayer composed by Brother Roger)

Song

(Philippians 4)



Sources of communion old and ever new

By the Holy Spirit, we are contemporaries of the birth of the Church, so the descriptions of the first Christians tell us something about ourselves as well. The experiences of the first Christian community have much to say to our life as Christians today. The very same Spirit that, on Pentecost day, inspired Peter, the other apostles and all who accepted the faith, makes us today a part of the communion of the Church.

"The first Christians sold their possessions and goods, and gave to everyone according to their needs. Every day they met for prayer in the Temple. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people" (Acts 2,45-47). This is a portrait of the Christian community immediately after Pentecost. And the Church of every age shares in this same life.

The radical newness of this life is obvious. At the same time, there is no sign of a break with the past or with those around them. The Temple, living centre of the nation throughout the centuries, is not merely respected, but serves as a daily meeting-place. How could the Christians have forgotten that Jesus had tried to restore its identity as a "house of prayer" at the risk of his life? Just as Christ did not come to reject but to gather together, the Christian community did not define itself in opposition to others; it "enjoyed the favour of all the people". It was not considered a foreign body, but rather the yeast that raises instead of dissolving the dough.

What is the meaning of this faithfulness to tradition? Was not the Temple destroyed some forty years later? In addition, those in charge of the Temple at that time were men of intrigue and dishonest practices. Buying and selling had been introduced right in the Temple courts; worship there had little in common with the spontaneity of the early days.

But that was not the question. The important thing was to find a way of expressing that whoever serves God is not the first to do so. Others have gone before us. Today we still sing the Psalms, those songs of praise that filled the Temple long before Jesus. Those who have transmitted to us faith and the spirit of praise become living signs of the fact that we are not the ones who have discovered God; God welcomes and loves us first. We rediscover the freshness of the early Christian communities first of all by learning simply to trust in all that God has given us already.

We are called to leave behind all regret and nostalgia for the past, and enter fully into the continuity of praising God. The Christians of Jerusalem knew that if they were to separate themselves from the community of the whole People of God, so diverse, and go off by themselves, they would be excluding themselves from the all-encompassing plan of God. God has a hope for the entire human family, and so we are called to risk something, to run the risk of not running away from the places where believers have praised God for centuries, even if they resemble the Temple of Jerusalem. Christ was fully aware of the situation of the Temple, and yet he loved it with burning zeal (cf. John 2,17).

Jesus was fully rooted in the prayer of his people and yet, trusting in his Father, he performed totally unexpected acts. In the same way, their fidelity to daily worship in the Temple gave the first Christians incredible imagination and freedom to respond to the demands of the present. The newness of the Gospel had to find new forms of expression in prayer as well as in the other aspects of life.

At that time, then, people's homes began to take on a much greater importance than ever before for life with God. The apostles prayed together "with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1,14) in a simple room. In homes believers celebrated and offered hospitality in "the breaking of the bread", that unique gift the Risen Lord gave of his presence. Sharing of possessions, hospitality for prayer and meals were practiced from one dwelling to another.

During his life on earth, Jesus was welcomed into homes and for meals. He invited others to share his bread and gave thanks for the food he had. In this way he gave to hospitality and to prayer, wherever they are lived out, a brand-new dimension. A home where hospitality and prayer are practiced is now a holy place, a place where Christ himself is present, a "tiny church", as a Christian of the fourth century put it.

The old Gospel is ever new. It invites us to find ways of expressing today God's love and forgiveness, which never grow old. These ways of expression, sought in faithfulness to the faith and worship of the centuries, will be quite simple: prayer, hospitality, and sharing. But they will speak of that Other to whom believers belong as a "treasured possession" (Exodus 19,5). Through those God has set apart, through community life in the Church, God welcomes us day after day. Like the father of the prodigal son, God welcomes us for a festival. □

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and the spirit of praise become living signs
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These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the underlined one is suggested. The reference in *italics* shows the source of the short reading.

Ved 1 May God enlighten the eyes of your mind, so that you can see what hope his call holds for you!

Isaiah 56.1-7 • *Ephesians 1.15-19* • *Luke 16.10-16*

Thu 2 Thus says the Lord: I live in the holy heights but I am with the contrite and humble, to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite.

Is 57.14-19 • *Ep 1.20-23* • *Lk 17.3-6*

Fri 3 When we were dead in our sins, God brought us to life with Christ.

Is 58.5-8 • *Ep 2.4-10* • *Lk 17.11-19*

Sat 4 If you do away with the clenched fist, if you deprive yourself to give to the hungry, your light will rise in the darkness, and your darkest hour will be like noon.

Is 58.9b-11 • *Lk 17.20-25*

SUN 5 Paul wrote to Timothy: I remind you how to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of strength, and love, and self-control.

Isaiah 61.1-3 • *2 Timothy 1.6-14* • *Lk 17.5-10*

SUN 6 Christ is the peace between us. Through the cross, in his own person he has ended hatred.

Is 60.1-5 • *Ep 2.12-18* • *Lk 18.1-8*

SUN 7 You are part of God's household. You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the corner-stone. Every structure knit together in him grows into a holy temple.

Is 60.17b-20 • *Ep 2.19-22* • *Lk 18.9-14*

SUN 8 The Lord sent me to comfort all who mourn, to clothe them with festal attire instead of despondency.

Is 61.1-3 • *Ep 3.2-6* • *Lk 18.15-17*

SUN 9 Paul wrote: Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we can be bold enough to approach God in complete confidence.

Is 61.10-11 • *Ep 3.7-13* • *Lk 18.18-27*

SUN 10 Jesus said: There is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times as much in this present age, and in the world to come, eternal life.

Is 62.1-5 • *Ep 3.14-21* • *Lk 18.28-34*

SUN 11 My hope is in you, Lord, save me from my sins. I keep silence, I speak no more, because you yourself have been at work.

Is 62.1-5 • *Is 62.10-12* • *Lk 18.35-43*

SUN 12 Paul wrote: Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. For him I have suffered, even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

Is 54.14-17 • *2 Tim 2.8-13* • *Lk 17.11-19*

SUN 13 With all humility and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love. Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.

Is 54.17-25 • *Ep 4.1-6* • *Lk 19.1-10*

Tue 14 The Lord said: Look, I am going to send peace flowing over my people like a river.

Is 66.12-14a • *Ep 4.7-13* • *Lk 19.28-40*

Wed 15 The Lord said: Seek me out and you will live.

Amos 5.4-24 • *Ep 4.13-16* • *Lk 19.41-42,45-48*

Thu 16 Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds, to put on the self that has been created on God's principles.

Am 7.12-15 • *Ep 4.22-29* • *Lk 20.9-19*

Fri 17 Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Am 8.11 • *Ep 4.30-5.2* • *Lk 20.20-26*

Sat 18 ST LUKE Jesus said to his disciples: Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

2 Tim 4.9-17a • *Lk 10.1-9*

SUN 19 Paul wrote to Timothy: Proclaim the message, welcome or unwelcome.

Is 45.1,4-6 • *2 Tim 3.14-4.2* • *Lk 18.1-8*

Mon 20 Paul wrote: You are light in the Lord; behave as children of light.

Micah 2.12-13 • *Ep 5.8-14* • *Lk 21.1-4*

Tue 21 Always and everywhere give thanks to God who is our Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mt 4.1-4 • *Ep 5.15-20* • *Lk 21.8-19*

Wed 22 Jesus said: Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Mt 5.1-4a • *Ep 6.10-13* • *Lk 21.29-36*

Thu 23 Jesus said to his disciples: I am among you as one who serves.

Mt 6.1-5 • *Ep 6.14-20* • *Lk 22.24-27*

Fri 24 This is what the Lord wants of you: only this, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Mt 6.6-8 • *Romans 1.1-7* • *Lk 22.28-34*

Sat 25 Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Mt 7.18-20 • *Mark 1.1-8*

SUN 26 I waited, I waited for the Lord, and he heard my cry. He put a fresh song in my mouth, praise of our God.

Ps 40 • *Ecclesiasticus 35.12-18* • *2 Tim 4.6-18* • *Lk 18.9-14*

Mon 27 At the baptism of Jesus, a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

Joel 3.1-5 • *Rm 1.8-17* • *Mk 1.9-13*

Tue 28 Jesus said: The Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the good news of the gospel.

Jonah 2.2-10 • *Rm 2.13-15* • *Mk 1.14-20*

Wed 29 Jesus taught in the synagogue. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught with authority.

Zephaniah 3.9-13 • *Rm 4.1-8* • *Mk 1.21-28*

Thu 30 In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a lonely place and prayed there.

Zp 3.14-18 • *Rm 4.17b-25* • *Mk 1.35-39*

Fri 31 If you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not be alarmed by adversity. Cling to him and do not leave him.

Ecclesiasticus 2.1-6 • *Rm 5.1-5* • *Mk 1.40-45*

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK (chapters 1-6)

Mark wrote his Gospel to transmit "the Good News concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1,1). The expression "good news" or "gospel" never refers to a small personal joy; it describes an earth-shattering event, a turning-point of human history. So what then is the new Reality linked to the coming of Jesus into the world? No response from the outside can be given to this question; the answer cannot be abstract or theoretical. By recounting events of the life and mission of Jesus, Mark wants to allow us to respond to this essential question in a way that can change our life.

The first words Jesus speaks in this Gospel sum up his message and give its basic structure: "The time has come and the Reign of God is at hand. Turn to God and believe in the Good News" (1,15). First there is the announcement of a new era that is beginning for the world: this "beginning" (1,1) is at the same time a fulfilment (1,15). Jesus often speaks of this fulfilment by using the Jewish expression "the Kingdom (or Reign) of God", in other words a world in full communion with its Creator and fully open to God's gift of life. But although this fullness of life is now accessible, it is by no means automatic. Human beings cannot sit by passively to await its coming; they have to welcome it actively by opening the depths of their being to God by an act of trust. They have to take the message and the messenger seriously, and live out the consequences of this.

Then Mark shows us this offer of new life and the human response in a specific event. Walking by the lake, Jesus calls four fishermen and "at once they left their nets and followed him" (1,16-20). From now on they have set out on an adventure with Jesus, and trust in him will be their only guide. This trust will enable them to cope with the doubts and difficulties that will inevitably arise. ▷

November

Sat 1 ALL SAINTS

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, they shall have their fill.

Revelation 7.9-14 • 1 John 3.1-3 • Matthew 5.1-12

SUN 2 Even if our own feelings condemn us, God is greater than our feelings and knows all things.

Wisdom 3.1-9 • 1 Jn 3.14-20 • Lk 12.35-45

Mon 3 You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside.

Ecclesiasticus 2.7-11 • Romans 5.6-11 • Mark 2.1-12

Tue 4 As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Si 4.9-10 • Rm 5.15-21 • Mk 2.13-17

Wed 5 Blessed is the person who does not torment himself with regret for his faults and who has not given up hope. If someone is harsh to himself, to whom will he be good?

Si 14.1-16 • Rm 6.1-6 • Mk 2.18-22

Thu 6 Paul wrote: We believe that if we died with Christ then we shall live with him too.

Si 15.11-18 • Rm 6.8-14 • Mk 2.23-36

Fri 7 Set free from sin and in the service of God, you will reap the holiness that leads to eternal life.

Si 17.1-12 • Rm 6.22-23 • Mk 3.7-19

Sat 8 The Lord's compassion extends to everyone. He corrects and teaches, bringing them back as a shepherd brings back his flock.

Si 18.8-13 • Mk 3.20-27

In his activity with others, Jesus gives glimpses of the reality of the Kingdom at work in everyday life. First of all there is "a new teaching--and with authority" (1,27) by means of parables, that is, images or anecdotes that make people think. Here too the accent is on the listeners' participation. They must not only learn things by rote or repeat stock phrases: by means of the parable, Jesus wants new insights concerning the identity and activity of God to spring up in them, so that their way of seeing the world may be transformed.

Wherever he goes, Jesus also heals the sick. That is another kind of parable, the portrait of a God who, like a physician, comes not first of all to those who might "deserve" it but to those most in need (2,17). Healing the body is a sign of a much deeper healing known as the forgiveness of sins. This becomes clear in the story of the cure of a paralyzed man (2,1-12). The first words Jesus says to this unwieldy and immobile man are "your sins are forgiven". Only later come the other words "get up and walk", which then refer to the soul as much as to the body. Forgiveness removes the burdens of the past and brings an unexpected lightness; it allows us to move forward by restoring a broken relationship.

A God motivated above all by compassion, by the desire to give life freely, can shock or even represent a crisis for those whose education has given them another idea of God. This is the case for some of Jesus' contemporaries. They are thus confronted with an alternative: either opening themselves to a new outlook by listening to Jesus and deepening their image of God, or else resisting the message and even trying to put an end to the messenger. And so there are a series of discussions between Jesus and those responsible for interpreting the religious traditions of the nation (2,1-3,6). The "familiar" attitude of Jesus toward God's Law is called into question, and especially his habit of associating with the outcasts of society. Jesus even invites a tax collector to be one of his closest companions, and he shares his bread with people considered to be "unclean" (2,13-17). In this way a new communion, with no frontiers, already begins to take shape around him.

Thus the Reign of God makes its way in the midst of incomprehensions and resistances. Like a tiny seed, its presence is discreet but dynamic (4,30-32). Wherever it finds good ground, it blossoms into overflowing life (4,1-9), food for a multitude (6,30-44).

SUN 9 In the day God sends his faithful love, and even at night the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the living God.

Ps 42 • Ezekiel 47.1-12 • 1 Corinthians 3.9-17 • Jn 2.13-22

Mon 10 Pardon your neighbour any wrongs. If anyone nurses anger against another how can they then demand compassion from the Lord?

Si 28.2-7 • Rm 7.4-6 • Mk 3.31-35

Tue 11 Cast your cares away, console your heart, chase sorrow far away; for sorrow is no use to anybody.

Si 30.21-23 • Rm 8.1-4 • Mk 4.1-9

Wed 12 Set your minds on what the Spirit desires: life and peace.

Si 34.12-17 • Rm 8.5-11 • Mk 4.13-20

Thu 13 The Lord will not be slow, until he has judged the case of his people, and made them rejoice in his mercy.

Si 35.17-24 • Rm 8.14-17 • Mk 4.21-24

Fri 14 Paul wrote: In hope, we already have salvation. Nobody goes on hoping for something which they can already see. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait for it with persevering confidence.

Nehemiah 1.7-10 • Rm 8.18-25 • Mk 4.26-29

Sat 15 Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest of garden plants.

Ne 8.3,8-10 • Mk 4.30-34

SUN 16 Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted for the sake of my name, and that will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Malachi 3.20 • Hebrews 10.11-14,18 • Lk 21.5-19

Mon 17 We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness, and makes our petitions for us into sighs that cannot be put into words.

Ne 9.17-19 • Rm 8.26-30 • Mk 4.35-41

Tue 18 Who can condemn us? Christ Jesus who died, yes and more, who was raised from the dead, is at God's right hand and adds his plea for us.

Lamentations 3.22-26 • Rm 8.31-39 • Mk 5.18-24

Wed 19 You are near, Lord, when I call to you. You said, "Do not be afraid."

Lm 3.55-58 • Rm 10.8-13 • Mk 5.25-34

Thu 20 Paul wrote: God does not withdraw his gifts or his call.

Baruch 3.24-38 • Rm 11.29-36 • Mk 5.35-43

Fri 21 The Lord said to his people: Look and see the joy that is coming to you from God.

Ba 4.36-5.4 • Rm 12.1-5 • Mk 6.1-13

Sat 22 Jesus and his disciples went to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. From every town the people hurried to the place, and reached it before them. Seeing the large crowd, Jesus had pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Ba 5.7-9 • Mk 6.30-34

SUN 23 God wanted all fullness to be found in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things.

2 Samuel 5.1-3 • Colossians 1.12-20 • Lk 23.35-43

Mon 24 Paul wrote: When you give, give generously from the heart; if you offer mercy, let it be offered joyfully.

Zechariah 2.14-15,17 • Rm 12.6-13 • Mk 6.35-Za 44

Tue 25 Never pay back evil with evil, but bear in mind the ideals that all regard with respect. As much as is possible, and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone.

Ze 8.4-8 • Rm 12.14-21 • Mk 6.45-52

Wed 26 Love your neighbour as yourself.

Ze 8.12-17 • Rm 13.8-10 • Mk 7.31-37

Thu 27 Rejoice and shout for joy! Look, your king is coming to you, just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey.

Ze 9.9-10 • Rm 13.11-14 • Mk 8.1-10

Fri 28 Alive or dead, we belong to the Lord. It was for this purpose that Christ both died and came to life again: so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Ze 12.10, 13.1 • Rm 14.1-13 • Mk 8.11-21

Sat 29 Jesus taught his disciples: The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the chief priests and the scribes, be put to death, and after three days to rise again.

Ze 14.5c-9 • Mk 8.27-33

SUN 30 ADVENT

Isaiah said: The mountain of the Lord will rise up higher than the hills and many peoples will come to it saying, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways."

Isaiah 2.1-5 • Rm 13.11-14 • Mt 24.37-44

September - October 1986 · Letter from Taizé

NEWS

SOUTHEAST ASIA

"Let me give you some news of what I have done here after the meeting in Madras. When I returned home to my country, I went to see the parish priest and told him what I had experienced in India. I showed him the photos, and the news made him very happy. My family and everyone who came to our house were very interested when I explained the pilgrimage. Two days after I returned, I left for China with a priest, two sisters and six young people. For two months we visited ten different villages, sharing our faith. It is not too far away from the place where I live so we can go on foot. It's easy to get from one village to another—only an hour's walk. All the inhabitants of these villages belong to my own tribe. In my country we are called "hill people". Soon I will go and live in a village on the Chinese border where I will be a catechist."

EGYPT

"The Coptic Church of Egypt was founded in the first century by the evangelist Saint Mark. In its history it has known bloody persecutions and numerous martyrs. It has also given birth to a flourishing monastic life: before the Muslim Arab conquest the deserts were filled with hermits and cenobitic communities.

"Today only a small number of monasteries have survived, and yet vocations are on the rise. These monasteries, as well as the entire Coptic Orthodox Church, are rooted in an almost two thousand year old tradition that remains astonishingly alive. Monks, priests and lay people, old and young, assist with great devotion at beautiful liturgies whose length is quite Oriental, as well as following a very strict Church discipline: Lent lasts fifty-five days with a strict fast and no meat allowed. What could seem to us here in the West a burden is not considered this way by the Copts; for them it is a part of the expression of their faith and their love for God.

"An absolutely unique experience is participating in the Palm Sunday liturgy in the ancient monastery of Saint Anthony, the desert father. The church is decorated with crosses, weaved palms and roses — and this in the middle of the desert! The service begins at three in the morning and lasts till after eleven, including a two-hour-long procession during which an icon and a flowered cross are incensed. Because of the beauty

of the setting and the singing, the fervour and the devotion of the congregation as well as the monks, in spite of the length of the prayer you are not bored, even without knowing the language, and you have the impression when you leave that the experience has transformed you."

CAMEROON

"We have been here now for three weeks, and the days have been so full that it is hard to stop and take stock of things. The community of sisters has welcomed us with so much simplicity and warmth that we feel very much at home in our new work with the lepers. There is a lot to do; we are trying to replace two sisters who have taken a leave of absence.

"In addition to their handicapped status, the lepers suffer from a social stigma. They are often abandoned by their families, and after months of hospitalization returning to their family circle or village is often quite difficult. I am not sorry to be here; in the midst of these sick people I know that what we are doing is useful, even if the results are terribly disappointing. Without the work of the sisters, their almost unbelievable perseverance and generosity, the lepers would die alone and forsaken in great pain. Here the Church is right in the middle of things. The young catechists we meet are exceptionally dynamic and generous. The witness they give is indeed "provocative". It is easy to see that generosity alone does not explain their commitment. They meet regularly in small communities for prayer.

"Perhaps this experience has enabled me better to understand some things that I believe, that I agree with, but that have to be rediscovered over and over again... Christ is here; I don't claim to have "felt" his presence, but I know it is true. His presence is discreet and faithful. Each moment of personal prayer is a time of waiting, of being ready and willing to welcome him. I feel so poor and at a loss before him; my life is full of fatigue and sadness at what I see, at all the suffering. But this is an invitation to pray even more; it helps me to understand, to "experience" that nothing is possible without prayer... Without trust in the mysterious presence of Christ, in his love within each one of us, I would be left only with feelings of powerlessness, aridity of heart, and the impossibility to be fully committed to lightening the sufferings that wound the lepers in their bodies and their hearts.

"I am discovering that there is a lot of work to be done here and that the results are limited. I am not discouraged even if the enthusiasm of the first days is at times dampened by what I experience. In spite of it all I feel very happy here..."

FINLAND

"We visited some Lutheran parishes and we were astonished by their gifts for undertaking social work. The Finns know how to welcome and relate to people whose lives are one long Good Friday. The parish in one section of Helsinki has become a place of hospitality for young people who live on the street. Deep friendships have been formed with them. Many of these young people have been deeply scarred by the separation of their parents. In the parish they acquire a new confidence in their capacity to form relationships. Little by little they also enter into a relationship with God and become able to devote themselves to doing something for others. There are other groups for married couples with problems or for alcoholics. One day we made a "pilgrimage" through the different church offices. Sometimes we stopped a while longer for a time of personal sharing. We were able to discover true "pearls". They are well hidden in some people but they begin to shine as soon as these persons are not treated as bureaucrats."

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